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SUBJECT: FRENCH SECRETARY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VISITS DRC

REF: Kinshasa 519

¶1. (SBU) Summary: French Secretary for Human Rights Rama Yade re-extended an invitation to President Kabila to visit France, announced a 300,000 euro grant to assist street children in Kinshasa and made a side trip to Bukavu during her June 8-11 visit to the DRC visit. The French hope Kabila will travel to Paris at the end of July.

Their relatively low-key approach to Congolese relations has enabled France to raise sensitive issues without the acrimony of recent Belgian-Congolese exchanges (reftel). End summary.

¶2. (SBU) French Secretary for Human Rights Rama Yade, in her first visit to the DRC June 8-11, re-extended an official invitation to President Kabila to visit France. She also reiterated France's support for the reconstruction of the DRC, especially the health, environment, and education sectors, during their June 9 meeting in Kinshasa. The French DCM told us Kabila did not confirm a specific date for the visit; the French embassy here hopes the visit will take place at the end of July.

¶3. (U) Yade announced a 300,000 euro grant to the NGO Medecins du Monde (MDM) to assist street children in Kinshasa. The grant will help provide food and medical care to children's centers throughout the capital. MDM estimates that 18,000 children live on the streets of Kinshasa. Many are believed to suffer from malaria, a number of infectious diseases, as well as untreated injuries and wounds of various kinds.

¶4. (U) Yade met with Governor Louis Muderhwa of South Kivu June 10 in Bukavu. She also visited the BVES Center for Child Soldiers and visited victims of sexual violence at Panzi Hospital. The French DCM said a planned visit to an IDP camp was cancelled due to logistical concerns.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Unlike the Belgians (reftel), the French appear to be well regarded within the DRC government. Through several high level visits this year, including by Foreign Minister Kouchner, they have made it known they want to strengthen bilateral ties. Their relatively low-key diplomatic approach, in contrast to the more strident behavior of many official Belgian visitors, coupled with foreign aid, seems to have struck a positive chord with Kabila. Additionally, Yade's personal presence and charm, herself of francophone African background, undoubtedly made a highly favorable impression here. End Comment.

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